

HAROLD M. LUVISCH
SIGNAL COMPANY EARLY WARNING HAWAII

#277

INTERVIEWED ON
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BY JEFF PAPPAS

TRANSCRIBED BY:

CARA KIMURA

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(Conversation off-mike)

Jeff Pappas (JP): The following oral history interview was conducted by Jeff Pappas for the National Park Service, USS *Arizona* Memorial at the Imperial Palace Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada on December 8, 1998 at eleven a.m. The person being interviewed is Harold Luvisch, who was [] working as an aircraft warning person on December 7, 1941. Harold, for the record, would you please state your full name, place and date of birth?

Harold Luvisch (HL): Yeah, my name is Harold Luvisch. I was born on January the sixteenth, 1919. I'll be eighty years old next month. Typical of the [] average age of the survivors, so I'm told. And I was born in Detroit, Michigan.

JP: Detroit, grow up in Detroit?

HL: Yes.

JP: Tell me about Detroit in the 1920s, early 1930s.

HL: Nice town. I enjoyed Detroit very much. Went to high school, some college at Wayne University.

JP: Is that Wayne State University?

HL: Wayne State. You know Detroit, it sounds like, Jeff. You Detroiter too?

JP: No, I'm not, but I've been to Detroit.

HL: Oh. And I was a rich kid. My father was a building contractor and had me on a salary of fifty bucks a week, no room and board at home and wasn't married [], I mean, the draft was looming. And I always tell this story and people say, "You're nuts," I guess.

But anyway, so I go down and I say, you know what I'm going to do, I'm going to join the army and avoid the draft!

And they say, "What the hell? How can you avoid the draft by joining the army?"

I say, "Well, I did it."

But what I was trying to do was pick my own branch of service of where I wanted to go and I'd heard of the Hawaiian Islands all my life, wanted to be there and I picked the Hawaiian Islands and Air Corps, Air Force. I forgot what it was in those days.

JP: The Air Corps?

HL: Air Corps. That's where I was, year before Pearl and—or Pearl we call it, the attack on Pearl. And enjoyed it very much up until then and even after that I enjoyed it.

JP: Well, we've just passed about eighteen years of your life. Let's go back a little bit and I want to know little bit more about Detroit, growing up as a rich kid, as you say, fifty dollars a week there in depression America. You must have been very well off.

HL: I was. I had bought, I had ordered a new Cadillac for myself in 1940 when I enlisted in the army, in November 11, 1940. Now my folks had a little party for me, a going-away party. Went downtown Detroit to join the army on the eleventh of November, it turned out to be Armistice Day and the army was closed. So I said, "I'm not going back home, another goodbye," so I stayed downtown all night, got a little drunk I suppose. But anyway, oh, let's talk about that Cadillac I ordered. I tell that story quite [*often.*]

JP: Well, let's keep the Cadillac to the side for a few minutes.

HL: All right.

JP: And let's talk about your schooling. Where you grew up exactly in Detroit. Do you remember the street that you were on?

HL: Sure I do. I recall going to school from a street called Meyers Road, north—no, not north—west side of town.

JP: West side of Detroit, still in Detroit proper though?

HL: In Detroit proper. Went to grade school. I recall the first day in grade school. In fact, McFarland Grade School.

JP: Okay.

HL: I was born in January so I was six years old, or five years old in January and I went to school and snowed like hell. I recall the story. My mother keeps telling me. She's dead now, of course. But my mother keeps telling me the story, [I] didn't come home for lunch. And well, they had some lunch at school and I couldn't get out, too much snow, so I stayed in school. Anyway, by the...

JP: Well, recall for me your house, where you lived.

(Taping stops, then resumes)

(Conversation off-mike)

HL: Oh, my house.

JP: Yeah, let's talk about your house.

HL: Meyers Road, Meyers Road, two-story house, two-family house. I recall very well. My father—we owned two other houses. There was four families. I lived in downstairs and somebody else lived upstairs. And...

JP: These houses, did they adjoin each other?

HL: No, they didn't join each other. They were just two family houses, stairs going upstairs on the outside of the house to the second floor. And then the basement. And I don't know why I remember them so well, but I do. West Chicago and Meyers Road, in that area.

JP: West Chicago, was that the name of the street?

HL: That's the name of the street. That's right.

JP: Okay.

HL: And I went to McFarland Grade School from there. From there...

JP: First tell me more about the house.

HL: Oh, the house.

JP: What about the inside of the house? What do you remember? Do you remember the woodwork? Do you remember any of the furniture that you had?

HL: Well, not the furniture. I remember hot air furnace for some odd reason because [*it*] was a wooden frame house on the outside. I don't remember much of the inside. But I remember the furnace. Oh, my father became a builder after that and I became a builder and I recall it was a gravity type furnace, which means that the furnace is in the center of the house and there was no pushing of the air, the air just

went up the ducts to the first floor. I don't know what happened to the second floor.

JP: Did you have any fireplaces?

HL: No, no fireplaces. Because I don't know why, I think I recall that just that then we graduated—of course, I'm talking way back, seventy-six, seventy years ago—graduated from gravity furnaces to forced air and now square ducts instead of round ducts, put 'em up close to the ceiling, so you could have more ceiling space in the basement and had a forced air situation.

JP: Did your family stay in this house for most of their lives?

HL: Oh, no, []. No [], we only stayed there 'til ten years maybe. Then I moved to a street on the next street west called Apoline, and down near Robert Oakman Boulevard, moved into a fancy house there. A brick house.

JP: Your dad's still a contractor at this time.

HL: Yes.

JP: What kind of contracting? Is he building homes?

HL: [] Mostly homes and he's a bootlegger on the side also. And this fancy house, oh that's right, the fancy house now on Apoline, on the corner of I don't know the name, Beltman, I think, was the name of the street. I'm really digging down from memory.

JP: All right.

HL: Had a big rec[reation] room. Let's talk about his, [] manufacturing of alcohol in those days?

JP: Well, no, before we talk about that, let's talk about, did you know he was bootlegging at the time, as a child?

HL: Oh sure. Oh sure.

JP: That wasn't kept a secret in the family?

HL: Oh no. In fact, when I was a little child, I recall I was talking just the other day to somebody from, ooh—not in Rhode Island, one of the eastern states, where my father used to take me there as a little kid. Three, four-year old boy. And it'd look good because he'd walk on a train with a little kid in his hand and of course everybody says hello and treat me like a little boy and would treat him like a father of the little boy and didn't realize that we're going down to one of the states in the East Coast that had liquor being delivered off-shore from Scotland, I think, and my father would make arrangements to have it shipped back to Detroit and he'd take a suitcase full of Scotch with him and never any troubles because the little boy, I was just part of the patsy, you know, part of the show. And I remember that vaguely and it was Rhode Island I'm talking about, Providence, Rhode Island. 'Cause we were talking about that right now. I have a grandson going to Brown University in Rhode Island.

JP: Why don't we—tell me your dad's full name then.

HL: [*Isadore*] Luvisch, his name was. Guy that came in from Romania at about eighteen years old and people said, "Do you ever go back?"

He says, "Hell, no, why would I go back?" He said, "The only thing I brought into this country was a case of,"—let's see—"crabs." He says, "The only thing I had was crabs when I came into this country. Couple bucks and a dose of crabs." So he says, "Why the hell would I ever want to go

back? That's stupid." He was an American a hundred percent, two hundred percent.

JP: Did you realize that bootlegging at that time was illegal?

HL: Oh, it didn't bother me, I don't suppose. Whatever he did was all right with me. I helped him. I got to the point where I was helping him.

JP: You were manufacturing alcohol?

HL: We were manufacturing more than alcohol. We were manufacturing bourbon.

JP: Where?

HL: In the basement, he had a still set up in the basement.

JP: Is that why you remember the furnace so well? You spent a lot of time...

HL: Well, maybe. No, that's a different house now.

JP: Different house.

HL: Yeah. This house had a big—we had four, five lots we had bought and we had a garden out in four of the lots and a house on the corner. And we used to have to get rid of the mash. So my father used to take the mash out and spread it on the garden. And then the pheasants would come and eat the mash, which is, you know, just the corn and sugar. And I'd stand up with a little air rifle on the second floor and shoot the pheasants if possible.

And then we had...

JP: Do you remember your father, had he been friends with others that had been bootlegging?

HL: Well, I remember who he sold some of his liquor to. And I got to the point where I was driver and I used to sell liquor. Not sell it, just deliver it. Six gallons in a, six gallon jars in a box. And we'd sell that stuff for about six dollars a gallon. And [I] got in big trouble one time after the war, 'cause I'd steal a [*pint*] sometimes and take it out with my buddies and we'd drink it. After the war, I came home and my father of course [*he brought*] a pint to me. It was about '45 or six I suppose. And I called a couple of buddies to come over and we were reminiscing about the good old days and they called my father's booze rot guts and I'd get pissed because "It wasn't rot gut."

And my father was there and I [*say*], "What the hell is going on? How come they call it rot gut?"

He says, "Well, you're the goddamn trouble, you jerks," he said it was a hundred and some odd proof. And my father didn't cut it, see. He'd sell it to bootleggers who would cut it, bottle it. He was the manufacturer. He would sell it to bootleggers now, instead of a manufacturing bootlegger, they'd cut it into bottle, cut it in half, put mineral—not mineral spirits—some sort of a glycerin or something to make it smoother, whatever they wanted to do, and cut it in half and it was smooth now, see. Like Canadian Club, about eighty-six proof. He says, "You were drinking a hundred and some odd proof."

JP: Did you ever get in trouble with the law?

HL: I never did, no.

JP: Your father?

HL: I think he did, yes. He was gone for a year at one time and I don't know where the hell he went.

JP: Tell me about your mother now.

HL: Mother was a doll, you know, named Rose.

JP: Rose, you remember her maiden name?

HL: Sure, Stoper out of Chicago.

JP: Stoper?

HL: Stoper, S-T-O-P-E-R. Still have some—in fact, I came out here to visit an uncle of mine that lives in Las Vegas. I start calling him when I knew I was coming to Las Vegas to look Saul up, Saul Stoper. Couldn't find him in the telephone directory. He was only eleven months older than I, see, so you know in those days, the old grandmas had kids. Didn't have TV to watch, you know, so you'd go to bed and have fun. You have kids. So I called him uncle...

JP: How many [*children*] did your parents eventually have?

HL: My parents only had two but my grandparents had about seven, I guess. So I still have an uncle who lives down in San Diego and I call him up and, "What happened to Saul in Las Vegas?"

"Oh, he died two years ago."

So I don't keep good track. So I'm unhappy with the fact that I come to Las Vegas to visit and I thought I'd give Saul a call and he's not here.

JP: Do you remember, growing up, of course, one of the first things Roosevelt, FDR, Franklin Delano Roosevelt had done when he assumed office in 1933 was to once again legalize...

HL: Yeah.

JP: ...the alcohol. Do you remember that as being a particular important moment in your family?

HL: No, not really because...

JP: Your financial situation had changed at all at that moment?

HL: No, no.

JP: No.

HL: No, because at that time, we, like most legitimate, like the Seagram family, who were bootleggers and now owned half the damn country, we were builders at that time. Or he was, became a builder because he had the financial backing. And it didn't bother us in the least. The only time he made liquor now, he had a little, bitty miniature still, maybe no bigger than this walking stick, that he'd take his residue from the wine that he liked to drink and he'd make brandy out of the residue of the wine. A process I don't understand, but he did it. I still got that still, by the way, the little one.

JP: Do you?

HL: Made into a lamp.

JP: Yeah. And let's go then, let's break to your high school years. Now we're looking at, oh, about 1934, '35.

HL: Yeah.

JP: Where'd you go to high school?

HL: Well, I went to high school in Detroit, city of Detroit, called MacKanize High School.

JP: Was it a private or public school?

HL: Public school. Wyoming Road, Wyoming and West Chicago, Plymouth Road area. Got kicked off the high school football team for smoking cigars. RG Dunns, two for a nickel, or whatever the price was in those days. And moderate student, not the world's brightest but not the world's dumbest. Had a lot of, still lot of good things. I went to the Car Museum, in fact, here, yesterday, I think it was, and seen the Car Museum. There was a couple of cars there. Ooh, boy, my memory's gone to hell though. One was a Duesenberg, with a convertible Duesenberg, with a rumble seat. My kid brother had one of those.

JP: What was your father driving at the time?

HL: He was driving a big Buick. I suppose. Because, oh, my father also, when he was making liquor, he had another still out on the farm, out near [*Farmington*], Mich., in that area. And I was a young kid I recall, about twelve years old. That's right. And I went to the farm - we stayed in the farm because he had a still out in the barn of the farm. Well he must have gone to town for some reason, he and my mother, and I grabbed, I took the Buick out of the garage, my brother and I, and I learned how to, taught myself how to drive this big Roadmaster, see. And there, those old cars, it must have been a 1929, '30 maybe. They're as big as a house, you know. And I remember coming to a bridge on this little two-lane gravel highway, boy and I maneuvered to get over that bridge. But I learned to drive that way.

JP: Yeah. Tell me now, you said that you had enlisted in the Army to avoid the draft.

HL: Yes.

JP: Is the way you phrased it.

HL: That's right.

JP: Tell me about the reasons or reason why you chose to enlist and why the army.

HL: Well, I felt when the draft come along, they talked the draft for the army and I didn't know they drafted people for the Navy or Marines and I thought I really knew it in those days was the Army, or thought about and I was gung ho kid, you know, and figured, another buddy of mine, we talked about when we enlist in the Air Force, Air Corps.

JP: What do you mean by gung ho? Were you restless?

HL: No, no, no. Just average kid that thought that the Army career was romantic and picturesque.

JP: So not just a stint but a career?

HL: No, not as a career. All I was doing, my father was paying me fifty bucks a week salary. And when it didn't rain, I mean when it rained, I got paid anyway. I'd lay off union carpenters that was making maybe thirty-five dollars a week. They didn't get paid that day, I got paid that day. So I'd go downtown to a cathouse or something and have fun. Go to Hamtramck, Mich.

JP: Tell me what's a cathouse?

HL: You know what a cathouse is, that's a whorehouse in Hamtramck. Beautiful little girls down there, two bucks a pop. A pop, whatever you want to call it, a piece. Not like Honolulu, you know, Honolulu had Hotel Street. You know, you don't know Honolulu?

JP: Well...

HL: You heard of Hotel Street? They had some nice girls there too for two dollars.

JP: So in other words, you weren't stretched for cash then?

HL: Oh, hell no. I always had cash. But I was a brighter guy than average, but making fifty bucks a week and no room, no board, not being married. Going out with a girl I finally married, I wasn't getting into. You know, I didn't like to piss my fifty bucks away so I used to go downtown. I'd buy myself a piece of jewelry or a new suit or a new pair of shoes. Had a new Chevy, I paid \$685 for. Ended up buying a new Buick eventually, paid about 800, 900 dollars for. Now we're talking about that Cadillac that I'd ordered. I ordered a new Cadillac. I stepped up from the Chevy to the Buick to the Cadillac. I think I was going to pay \$1,400 for the Cadillac, brand new from the dealer, LIV-ER-NOISE, LIV-ER-NOISE Avenue. So anyway...

JP: When did they start making Cadillac's?

HL: Oh hell, I don't know when, but they're pretty old. I never worked in any of the factories, but the army thought I did eventually. I'll tell you that story after.

Anyway, I ordered the Cadillac, \$1,400 bucks and when I enlisted in the army, I went back to the Cadillac dealer and decided to tell him I didn't want the car, I was going in the army. He said okay, take it off the books, give my hundred-

dollar deposit back, I suppose. And I should have kept the damn car for sure.

Anyway, made up my mind that I wasn't going to be drafted because I didn't like the idea of them taking me and putting me as a foot soldier in the infantry somewhere and not knowing where I was going, what I was going to do, because I liked to be in charge of my own destiny. So how else could I be in charge [] better than being in the Air Corps in the Hawaiian Islands? I said what a beautiful spot.

JP: What, did you choose that assignment?

HL: Oh sure I did.

JP: So you basically had a choice then?

HL: Sure I did.

JP: What you wanted to do, you could...

HL: When you enlist, you do that. You had your choice what you want to be, where you want to go. And that's what I chose and within a month I was there.

JP: Where did you enlist? In Detroit?

HL: In Detroit, Michigan, sure.

JP: Where'd you go to boot camp?

HL: Never went to boot camp. Ended up right in the Hawaiian Islands. Just went down to a camp in, I think, Pennsylvania, Indian Town Gap, maybe. They give me a CCC uniform, meaning Civilian [*Conservation*] Corps.

JP: It's like conservation corps?

HL: That's right. Nineteen eighteen model overcoat and a campaign hat from the Spanish-American War. That was my outfit. No training. I learned a lot of things that first couple days in the army. Had a blanket, had a pot belly stove, I think called a SI-BI-LEE stove, it was shaped like this and it went up to a funnel and living in a tent. Had a little suitcase about this narrow, this wide. And I put my blanket on the suitcase one day, making up my bed and the damn blanket tipped over and hit the stove. Burnt the nap off the [*blanket.*] Not a hole, just the nap off one side. Well, the next week, we shipping out again, [] I fold the blanket up with that nap burnt off on the outside so they could see it, me an honest kid. I had a little accident, you know. So take it to the supply sergeant on my way out and I said, "I had a little accident with the blanket and I burnt a hole, I burnt this nap off."

He said, "That's all right. You'll sign a statement of charges."

I said, "What the hell is that?"

He said, "You're going to pay for it."

"How much?"

He said, "Six dollars and eighty-five cents."

I remember all this bullshit. I said, "All right, I'll send it home to my mother."

"Send it home to your mother! Captain, come here!"

He calls a captain in, says, "This kid wants to steal our blankets!"

"I'm paying for it." Which made good sense. I burnt the blanket, I acknowledged the fact I want to pay the 6.85, whatever it was. I think it's my blanket now!

"Oh, hell no, it's government property."

So they took my 6.85 and they said we keep the blanket. They put the blanket back in inventory of course. So I learned in a hurry that you got to be careful of what you say and what you do in volunteering, what you sign, in fact I got to be an officer eventually, two or three years down the road. And my name being L-U-V-I-S-C-H, L-U-N-C-H, L-U-N-C-H, so I got—and I used to have to read the guy's mail, you know, outgoing mail I had to censor. I was an officer and I used to write it. So I changed my name to "Outto Lunch." Outto Lunch, Outto Lunch, Outto Lunch, instead of Luvisch, Lunch. And I was just having fun with myself because I'm built that way.

JP: Well, let's go on. You travel cross-country now, of course.

HL: Yeah.

JP: To the West Coast.

HL: Yes.

JP: Do you remember that trip at all?

HL: Yes, I do.

JP: What was one thing, one thing you remember most about that trip?

HL: Well, it was a troop train from the East Coast to the West Coast, took us about four days because they crisscrossed the country, because they—I don't know whether they knew that

any sabotage or something, but anyway they were crisscrossing the country. Oh, yeah, that was the trip. They were crisscrossing the country and we had a three-man, we had sleeping coaches, but three men slept in the compartment. Two up and one down. Luckily I was a big kid, so I got the down. So anyway...oh, now we had—we didn't have cooking facilities, believe it or not. We had boxcars. They had to pile about that much dirt in the boxcars, put a big stove, an army type stove on top of the dirt. Stove about this tall and about this square. They built a fire in there on top of the dirt. [] We didn't have dining facilities so now they asked for volunteers to carry the food up and down the isles. Well, I'm sitting there doing nothing and I said - they tell you not to volunteer, but I said that's silly. And rather than sit, I'd rather volunteer to carry the food up and down the aisles. 'Cause I was a husky kid, [*and*] I liked to keep busy.

So anyway, they [*gave*] me an apron and a hat, chef's hat, and I'm walking with the food up and down. We come to a stop, everybody off, exercise, and they had guards, believe it or not. Now whether you joined the army, enlisted in the army, they were afraid you'd run away, so they had guards, permanent guards, from the original beginning of the station we left. And the cooks [], were permanent party. So now me wearing a chef's hat and an apron on, I was considered permanent party, so I could get off the train without being having the scrutiny of the armed guards. I'd walk into the train station and look around there and they're selling Hershey bars for a nickel, I said, well, give me a couple Hershey bars. Give me the whole box. I had the money in my pocket. I buy a box of Hershey bars, go back in the train. I buy 'em for a nickel, go back on the train, I was no dummy, "Anybody want a Hershey bar for ten cents?"

Geez all the hands went up.

JP: Quite the entrepreneur, weren't you?

HL: I was. Always had been.

JP: Let's get, let's get onto, let's go to Hawaii now. You're on, you're in the air corps and you're stationed at Pearl?

HL: No, I was stationed at Hickam.

JP: At Hickam Field.

HL: Hickam Field.

JP: All right, tell me a little bit about the Air Corps back then?

HL: Well, the Air Corps, of course, had very little knowledge of soldiering. They were a glamour outfit. They start issuing some field packs to us one day, I recall, nobody knew how to fold it up.

JP: You were, what, a glamour outfit? Didn't you have, you must have had some specific duties to do, a certain function?

HL: Well, I'm just saying that one of the times that they issued a field pack to me, but nobody knew how to pack it, how to fold it. And I'd been a boy scout back in civilian life and a boy, S. P. Ellis, being the patrol leader. And I knew how to fold the pack and so I says, "I can fold that up," and bigger than hell I'm showing the guys how to fold it from my Boy Scout training.

JP: What was the function of the Air Corps?

HL: Well, I was in the headquarters squad, 17th Air Force Headquarters Squadron and my main function of my job was to cut grass mostly. And I went to a school to become an air

mechanic. Now, I'm just telling stories how lucky I've been all my life and still am. I became an air mechanic. Then...

JP: What did it mean to become an air mechanic?

HL: Well...

JP: Is that, were you actually fixing planes?

HL: Yeah, we had a job.

JP: So you learned the mechanics of fixing engines of...

HL: That's right, that's right.

JP: ...prop planes that had been at Hickam Field.

HL: Right.

JP: Did you have training there?

HL: Yes, right on Hickam.

JP: What kind of planes did you work on?

HL: Never worked on any of the planes. All I was doing, going to school. So I was going to school—now, this is that year before Pearl Harbor, I mean that whole year, about eight, ten months, let's call it, before Pearl. 'Cause the last two months, I was in Signal Corps, see, I moved out of the Air Force. Now, why'd I move out of the Air Corps? I was going to A. M. school, air mechanics school, and I got sick one day, went to sick hall. I had a rash in my legs, 'cause it's called Doby itch, like athlete's foot, except it climbed up your legs.

JP: You called it Doby itch?

HL: Yeah, Doby itch. Climbed up your legs into your crotch area. So they, I went to sick hall they gave me ammoniated mercury, two percent solution. See, I got a hell of a memory for some of this crap.

So it turned out to be twenty percent solution so wherever [*they*] applied the twenty percent ammoniated mercury, the skin came off. Came off my testicles and the whole damn thing. So it just put me back in the hospital. I waddled down to the hospital. They put me in the hospital. And now I'm a week behind, after I got out of the hospital, I'm a week behind my class. My class graduates and they get assigned to a tactical outfit from the headquarter squadron we were in. They get assigned to an outfit called the Third Bomb Squadron, and in the Third Bomb Squadron, there was a guy called Colin Kelly, a hero. Turned out to be a hero of Bataan, flying officer.

JP: Okay now, I think we're going to stop there for a second and change tapes.

HL: Yeah.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

JP: Okay, I'm back with Harold Luvisch. Harold, at this time in the story now we're about several months away from the bombing at Pearl Harbor. You're, at this time, you're thinking about transferring from the air corps to someplace else. You had gotten ill and you had been, they had treated you for that illness from what you told me.

HL: Yeah.

JP: Tell me about where you transferred to ultimately and then let's get right on to...

HL: Sure. Well, the big factor was I was ill, I was behind my class for a week. My class moved out to the Philippines. I lost all my buddies. They were moved to the Philippines. I got pissed so I says, the hell with this. I read an article in the newspaper, there was a Signal Corps looking for recruits.

JP: What newspaper is this?

HL: I don't know. The Army News, the Army Times, whatever it was in the Hawaiian Islands. They're looking for recruits. And all my buddies were gone. I was down. I was mad, I was sad. I got a letter from one of my buddies from the Philippines and he was having a ball there. I was mad 'cause I wasn't there.

JP: Okay.

HL: So I moved out of Hickam Field over to...

JP: Could you just do that back then? Just decide to leave the Air Corps?

HL: Well, yeah, there was procedure, but I went down to the headquarters, to the squadron room and said I want to transfer into the Signal Corps and the Signal Corps says they want me. Okay, and that was it.

JP: So you had to fill out some papers?

HL: Oh sure.

JP: ...application form.

HL: Whatever it was. Whatever it was.

JP: Okay. So you got accepted now into the Signal Corps?

HL: Now I'm in the Signal Corps.

JP: Which still part of the Army.

HL: Oh sure. U.S. Army, USA. Anyway, now I'm in the Signal Corps. This is maybe two months before Pearl.

JP: Okay.

HL: So now, the Signal Corps outfit was called Aircraft Warning Company, I call it. The correct name, I think, was Aircraft Warning Regiment, but I called it just company, 'cause I didn't know about a regiment in those days.

[*Note: The Aircraft Warning Service, Hawaii (AWS,H)* was operated by the Signal Company, Aircraft Warning, Hawaii (SCAWH).]

JP: Where was that located? You had a physical facility?

HL: We had a, shoot, in Fort Shafter, which was the headquarters of the army, US Army in the islands, Fort Shafter is on Oahu. Then we had about eight radar stations around the perimeter of Oahu.

JP: So that's what you did. You worked on radio communications?

HL: I worked in a radar aircraft radar warning company (*Signal Company Aircraft Warning Hawaii*), but I worked in the information center, in headquarters.

JP: Which is? That's the headquarters.

HL: In Fort Shafter.

JP: What did they do at the information centers? What was the function there?

HL: Well, we took the reports from all the radar stations of all their readings that they had when they were working their radar units. They'd pick up something on a scope that showed, tell us when they have something in the air.

JP: Now these are from the ground troops though essentially?

HL: Yes.

JP: Not from the ships or from...

HL: Oh no, no. This is all ground radar.

JP: Okay.

HL: I forgot the number 280, or something like radar unit. [Note: the Radar unit is type SCR-270-B.] They'd pick up a reaction up in 100 miles out.

JP: So signals are being sent to you from...

HL: Not sent, it's just that we were picking up objects in the sky that were strange. Sometimes it was rain, heavy rain that had lot of iron in the rain. Or something we had, we'd pick up things we didn't know what we had picked up.

JP: So this is basically airplane communications.

HL: It was designed for airplanes and it worked with airplanes, but occasionally we had mystery blips, blips they called 'em, blips.

JP: So the radio technology then back then would pick up just about anything?

HL: Well, if there was something that—yeah. We would have interference on our scope and it would make a blip-blip-blip-blip-blip-blip.

JP: That could be lightning.

HL: Could be lightning, could be a lot of things.

JP: Heavy rains.

HL: Heavy rains, with a lot of water that had iron content or mineral content that destroyed our radar screens.

JP: Okay.

HL: So they tended to be—I worked in a information center.

JP: All right. Explain to me what inside of the information center, kind of visualize it.

HL: Primarily it was a barn in the cable yards at Fort Shafter, secondary installation because nobody knew of us, really, and they didn't know what we did in the second place.

JP: Well, who didn't know what you did?

HL: The army didn't know. The brass in the army I don't think knew what the hell what we were doing.

JP: Well, let's hold off on that and explain to me kind of the mechanics, or the mechanical equipment that you had inside this particular area.

HL: All we had was telephones and a big table, a big platting table and a plotting map that we'd record the history of what we were plotting on the table.

JP: What were the dimensions of this table?

HL: The table was maybe six feet by eighteen feet wide, or square.

JP: That was a model of the...

HL: Model of mostly Oahu, mostly Oahu. Some of the other islands might have bordered a little bit.

JP: So there were a couple of telephones there?

HL: We had about six or seven. We had eight telephones.

JP: And they were hooked up to a...?

HL: To a radar station around the islands.

JP: Do you know how many radio stations were on the island?

HL: We had eight at the time, if I recall.

JP: And how many co-workers did you have, did you work with?

HL: I worked with at least eight and a supervisor and a plotter.

JP: Do you remember the name of your supervisor?

HL: Well, one of them was George Potts, Sergeant Potts. I remember the name of the telephone operator, I mean, telephone—yeah, not the operator, the telephone... [*Note: Harold M. Luvisch is referring to PFC Joseph P. McDonald*]

the switchboard operator at the Information Center at Ft, Shafter.]

JP: Now, how busy were you guys? I mean were you guys busy or was this...

HL: Not too busy. Whenever airplanes flew, then we had airplanes and then we'd plot them, and...

JP: So essentially you'd get a phone call and someone would tell you...

HL: That's right.

JP: ...that there was some activity going on around the islands.

HL: That's right. Now, the big problem we had of course, we had eight scopes around the island, now everybody had a lap to cover and we'd overlap occasionally, now. You had a number eight overlap and we'd pick up a double reaction here from this station to this station. So we had to decide, what do we have two airplanes or one being overlapped?

JP: How did that, how did you figure that out?

HL: Well, the grids were about this big and they were three by five miles. On a three by five mile area, you could pick up a lot of airplanes. So our blips were about an inch long.

JP: Do you know what the scale model was for the island? Remember the scale ratio?

HL: Well, I'm saying...

JP: That represented a three by five miles.

HL: Three by five miles were about this large. And this was called "Helen," this one was called "Thirty-five." So we called Thirty-five, Helen is right there. Now five, five is five over and five up and right in the center is five, five. Six, three is six of a tenths over and three-tenths up.

JP: So that's how they coordinated.

HL: That's how we coordinated, we read the maps.

JP: Okay.

HL: So then, what...

JP: Oh, you got the phones.

HL: Oh.

JP: How, I just want to get a general idea of how busy you were. How do you suppose, would it ring?

HL: Well, on a busy day we have a hundred airplanes to plot.

JP: That's within how many hours?

HL: Oh, in eight hours.

JP: That's an eight-hour day.

HL: An eight-hour day.

JP: So, what was your typical day? You worked from nine to five?

HL: Yeah, that was it, or maybe a little before that.

JP: Mm-hm.

HL: Nine to five.

JP: So you guys were taking signals during the day? Was it a twenty-four hour facility?

HL: No. We didn't work twenty-four hours because it was training mostly and we didn't have any, wasn't looking forward to anything other than training. We didn't have enough people to man twenty-four hours.

JP: Yeah.

HL: But a lot of training, so we play the training just like real work.

JP: Okay.

HL: Of course that's all the army was doing those days, was training, so the navy also. So training was work. You came to work to real combat eventually.

JP: Right.

HL: Anyway, you want to jump to December 7? That's a little early.

JP: No, I think you've adequately described for me what you did. So basically you would plot on the model.

HL: Yeah.

JP: And that's what your job was, to receive phone calls. Now, were you talking to people? You were talking to people from those eight...

HL: Radar units.

JP: ...radar units.

HL: Right.

JP: Okay and they would tell you...

HL: Yes.

JP: ...certain...

HL: Then at the almost...no, this is after December the seventh I'm trying to think of now. After December 7, maybe I'm wrong, but we finally got civilian girls to volunteer to answer these phones, these eight phones. And I as a supervisor would cut in and see if they were plotting right, 'cause it was such a simple job, didn't require a full-time soldier. All it said, they would call in from the radar station. They'd say, "We have an [*something*] at so-and-so and so-and-so."

And she would come over and they had the ability to tell us where it was. And we had the ability to know where it was, six, five, Helen, three, three. And the girl would plot three, six, five, Helen, three, three and put a little arrow there.

JP: Okay.

HL: Now my job as a supervisor was to double-check to see that she knew what she was doing. And if I get two or three arrows in this three by five mile area, and I knew there was only one airplane up there, then I would correct that down to one.

JP: Do you remember any of these women?

HL: No.

JP: These young girls, any of their names?

HL: No. None.

JP: Do you know how many total came through your facility during your stay at this particular station?

HL: No, not really because I really don't remember that 'cause I got moved off that station in about a month or two after the war. I moved over to Maui.

JP: Okay, so this is after December 7.

HL: After the seventh.

JP: You were still at this facility that morning.

HL: That morning I was there.

JP: Let's go there then. You were talking earlier that you had worked the five to seven shift in the morning.

HL: Well, that must have been an emergency, something. I was a buck, I was a buck ass private. Very little to think about and just do as I was told.

JP: Well, when did you become a supervisor? You said you were supervising these women?

HL: Well, I'm not sure whether it was, I think it was after December the seventh.

JP: Okay, irrelevant. But you're there that morning, though.

HL: Yes.

JP: At the facility.

HL: Yes.

JP: And you work the five to seven shift?

HL: Right.

JP: Why was it an emergency, though? You never worked...

HL: I don't know why. All of a sudden we got to work from five to seven and I don't know why. Somebody said that we have a—not an emergency—we have a shift five to seven to work, period.

JP: Did you later find out why it was just a five to seven shift?

HL: No, never knew. Never found out. So I worked the five to seven. I mean, that's my orders, that's what I do.

JP: Doing the normal thing?

HL: Doing whatever I did. But luckily it was a Sunday morning, there were very few airplanes in the sky when we started off at five o'clock in the morning. Nothing to do. At seven o'clock, still very little to do. At seven o'clock, I quit in fact because there was nothing to do.

JP: Had you plotted anything that morning?

HL: No. Not really.

JP: Got any phone calls?

HL: No, not really.

JP: Not really?

HL: Not that I recall.

JP: All right.

HL: But we had one of our stations still operative.

JP: One of the field...

HL: Stations.

JP: ...stations was operative. They were working.

HL: That's right. I think it was number eight at Opana.

JP: Okay, just one out of the eight.

HL: That's right.

JP: Now, where is that located?

HL: Opana is up, I believe it's the north end of the island of Oahu, down near Turtle Bay. Your outfit making a park area out of it or something now. I was there two years ago at that meeting at Turtle Bay.

JP: Okay.

HL: And at the dedication of it.

JP: Okay, so that's the only operative area right now.

HL: That's right.

JP: Radio area. You go off duty.

HL: I go off duty.

JP: What happened between seven o'clock and 7:55, in your life?

HL: Well, I recall I went off duty, had breakfast, went back to my tent and lay down. Couple guys come wake me up. They say, "Come on out here and look at these airplanes."

They knew I'd been in the Air Corps. They knew I should be able to identify airplanes, having been in the Air Corps for ten months.

JP: Sure.

HL: I look at the airplanes up there and they're silver. All I know is the army was O.D. [*Olive Drab*]

JP: O.D.?

HL: Color O.D., painted O.D.

JP: What does O.D. mean? Is it an acronym or a symbol or an abbreviation?

HL: I don't know what the hell it means. It means a color.

JP: Okay.

HL: The O.D. clothes, you know. I don't know what it means really. But it's a color, it's a brownish color, O.D. I never thought about it, what it meant.

Anyway, I look up at those airplanes flying around and they were silver. I didn't see any rising sun on 'em at the time. They were silver. I said, "Well, I identified them, they're either Army or Navy—not Army—Navy or Marines."

JP: You thought they were American planes.

HL: American planes, still silver. See when you go to war...

JP: Time out, okay.

(Taping stops, then resumes)

JP: Okay, Harold, so you've been called out now by your friends. This time you'd finished breakfast, you were basically on R and R.

HL: That's right.

JP: You finished your shift, five to seven.

HL: That's right.

JP: They called you out to see if you could identify some of these airplanes.

HL: Airplanes.

JP: You identified them as...

HL: Navy.

JP: ...possible Navy or Air Corps, Army.

HL: Because they were silver colored.

JP: Okay.

HL: And [*the*] Army was O.D.

JP: Didn't you guys ever do any training with silhouettes to identify any aircraft?

HL: I didn't. I don't recall ever doing any of that.

JP: Served in the Air Corps and you never trained?

HL: I don't recall, no.

JP: Okay. So you couldn't tell by the shape. The only thing that you could identify or use to identify enemy aircraft was the color.

HL: That's right.

JP: And they happened to be the color of our planes.

HL: Well, see, I was in Headquarter Squadron and Headquarter Squadron supplied men to the various tactical outfits and so until I got some training, I wasn't out there learning silhouettes. I remember doing a month of K.P.

JP: Yeah.

HL: I remember doing a lot of cutting on the...

JP: So you never had any training on identifying enemy aircraft?

HL: Not really. I started A. M. school, which I quit when I got sick that time and I got very little training, but I knew the colors of the airplanes were O.D.

JP: So you guys were sitting around on the field, essentially, Shafter.

HL: That's right.

JP: And you're looking up in the sky.

HL: That's right.

JP: And nothing particularly anxious about that moment until...

HL: Until you start hearing the noise. We were at Fort Shafter which is, I think, three, four miles from Hickam.

JP: Were they strafing you at that time?

HL: Shaking?

JP: Strafing? Were they firing on you with machine guns?

HL: Oh no, no, no, no. We heard the bombs at Pearl. And then somebody had a radio and they said, "Geez, they're bombing Pearl Harbor."

JP: Now at this time, what do you do? Do you go back to your station?

HL: I went back to my bed.

JP: Went back to bed.

HL: After identifying those airplanes...

JP: That's it.

HL: ...not being, as being friendly. Went back to bed and finally somebody come over woke me up again or got me out of bed to say, "Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor."

"What the hell you talking about?"

So now I run back to my job, which is down the street to the recrea—not recreation—to the information center.

JP: Went back to the information center. You just left it at seven, but you went back.

HL: I went back there now...

JP: What's going on there now?

HL: Now, we're busier than hell all of a sudden because...

JP: Well, you had the number eight.

HL: Now...

JP: The eighth unit, the eighth radio...

HL: Is picking up all kinds of stuff.

JP: So now you're receiving this information.

HL: And until then, they were bypassing us on the information plotter, going from to our telephone operator, no, our information center.

JP: Okay. Were there any women working with you...

HL: No, none.

JP: ...at the information center that morning?

HL: No, just one boy named [*PFC Joseph P. McDonald*] Joe McDonald .

JP: Joe McDonald.

HL: I talked to him a few times, lives in Palm Beach, Florida, but I think he's dead.

JP: So you went back to the information center, there was one guy on duty.

HL: That's right.

JP: Though they shut down at seven. Didn't they? Did they?

HL: Well, his job was a telephone operator. He had to stay on duty most of the time.

JP: And of course he was answering phones there at the information center.

HL: That's right. That's right.

JP: What proximity was it, from the model, from the graph, from your...

HL: I don't know, but he wasn't in our area. He was in another little room, ten feet away, maybe.

JP: Okay.

HL: With the telephone. And ironically he used to blame himself. In fact, he went a little off his rocker. He blamed himself because he'd call, well, maybe I'm getting ahead of myself.

JP: No, it's okay.

HL: He'd call a guy, a [*1st*] Lieutenant [*Kermit A.*] Tyler, [*Army Air Corps*], who was...

JP: Air Corps.

HL: Air Corps, who was representing, who he had contacted that day to determine whether Air Corps had any airplanes in the air. We called him once, he said, "Yeah, we got B-17s coming in."

Called him a second time, "Yeah, we got B-17s coming in."

JP: Who's calling here?

HL: McDonald is calling him.

JP: McDonald's calling, why? Did he...

HL: Well, he worried, he worried about it because (*Pvt. Joseph*) Lockhart was calling in all this activity on the scopes.

JP: Now, Lockhart, who's this now?

HL: Joe Lockhart, he's the guy that had 'em on the scope.

JP: He's over...

HL: At Opana.

JP: And he's calling in now to the information center.

HL: That's right.

JP: Do you know what time this is? Did you look at your watch that morning?

HL: Well, no, I didn't look at my watch, 'cause I wasn't there even. I just know the story. Prior to 7:55, I'd say 7:30, start calling most likely.

JP: But you said you know the story, did you actually talk to McDonald about this?

HL: Oh sure.

JP: After the fact, or...

HL: After the fact.

JP: Okay, all right.

HL: After the fact.

JP: All right.

HL: After the fact, he...

JP: So you never witnessed the discussion between him and Lockhart?

HL: No, no.

JP: Okay.

HL: No. I went back and did my job and then my job was, see, when a call would come in from the Opana, goes through McDonald, McDonald would pipe it to me, or to one of eight operators. We had eight...

JP: Right.

HL: ...attendants around, one for each station.

JP: Right.

HL: That morning, I don't think we had more than three because there was only the one station working.

JP: Right. Now you had already the bombs at this time though.

HL: But I'd heard the bombs, I knew something was wrong, so I ran back to go do my job in the information center.

JP: Now, had someone told you at that time that there were also B-17s coming in or you...

HL: No.

JP: No one told you.

HL: This is after the fact again.

JP: All right, good.

HL: This is after the fact that when McDonald called the air corps, the air corps said, "Yeah, we got B-17s coming in." And finally they said, "Don't bug me, kid. We got B-17s. I've told you twice now, three times. Sunday morning, I'm tired, you know."

JP: Yeah, but you had heard the bombs though. When did you realize this was enemy aircraft?

HL: Oh, I realized that 7:55. I knew that. But up until then, is what I'm saying, was McDonald talked to [*Kermit*] Tyler, [*1st*] Lieutenant Tyler, and Tyler says, "Don't bug me. We know we got B-17s coming in, coming in a little different azimuth, but..."

JP: Where is Tyler located at this point?

HL: I think he, I don't know exactly, but I thought he was at Hickam. I'm not positive though.

JP: Okay. Okay. So in other words...

HL: Supposedly.

JP: ...McDonald had heard word from Lockhart.

HL: Yes.

JP: And now McDonald is relaying that message to...

HL: Tyler.

JP: And this is all after the fact, though.

HL: This is stuff I've heard after the fact but I know it's positive because all the books that say...

JP: Well, let's not talk about the books, the story that you've read. I want to know the story that you knew that day.

HL: All right.

JP: What you witnessed.

HL: I heard the bombs. I didn't see any bombing. I went back to work and now I got a telephone system directly to the operators. Now some of the other operators got going too.

JP: Yeah.

HL: Other than number eight, Opana. And somebody was —'cause I recall I talked about this this morning to a sailor on the *Arizona*, some survivor.

JP: So now you're, you got headphones on.

HL: Yes.

JP: What are you listening to?

HL: To an operator of a radar station that's physically watching Pearl.

JP: Which radar station?

HL: I don't know.

JP: Okay. Is this one of those eight radar station?

HL: One of the eight.

JP: So now one, this isn't eight though?

HL: No, not number eight.

JP: So another one is operating at this time.

HL: Yeah, he's physically seeing Pearl.

JP: Okay. All right.

HL: And he says, "Jesus Christ, the ship got hit and jumped out of the water and turned over."

And I got chills, I recall that. I said, "Jesus Christ, what the hell is going on?"

JP: Now at this time, is McDonald with you in the same building?

HL: No, no. He's, no, no. I don't know where he was.

JP: Okay.

HL: I'm talking directly to the operator of this radar unit. I don't know who it was even.

JP: All right.

HL: I ran into a guy yesterday called Rex something or other. My outfit.

JP: Okay.

HL: I knew him. I had an outfit that had lots, eight units and lots of people. We didn't get to know each other. We show up at the headquarters once a day, once a month for payday.

JP: But now you're hearing things over...

HL: Over the telephone about...

JP: Are you wearing headphones or you're listening to the telephone?

HL: I'm wearing headphones.

JP: Okay.

HL: Listening to the telephone with through the headphones.

JP: Now what to you do now? What's your job?

HL: Now my job is plotting all these airplanes that are flying. The B-17s that are coming in and the Japanese, and we still can't separate the two because we didn't know how.

JP: Who's there with you now?

HL: Now all of a sudden I look up in the balcony and a lot of people are up there all of a sudden.

JP: Sure. Any brass?

HL: Lots of brass. That's where the brass stayed. And I recall some general, I think he was, calling me up to say—my grid

was three or five inches and it was six or seven one-inch pips on it on that grid. And he said, "Which way is that plane flying, soldier?"

I says, "Shit, I don't know."

So I straightened it up, "He's flying north, sir."

JP: What was the mood? Was it frantic, confused?

HL: Oh yeah. Lot of confusion.

JP: Or was, still in control at the time?

HL: Frantic, confused. We didn't know what was going on.

JP: How do you function under pressure?

HL: I function very well under pressure. The brass didn't realize that they had radar. They didn't know what radar meant.

JP: So this is a revelation to them? This was...

HL: That's right. All of a sudden, they, "Geez, you mean to say that we have airplanes from a hundred miles out there that you're plotting here?"

JP: You're telling me that the brass at that time didn't know that...

HL: Some of them didn't know.

JP: ...you were receiving...

HL: Yes.

JP: Okay.

HL: They didn't know they had a radar unit on the islands, I don't think.

JP: Let's be fair to the brass and so it was your impression at that time that they were unaware of your radio...

HL: Oh, positively. Some of them knew, no doubt. Signal Corps knew. My officers knew what it was all about. They were trained in England, brought it back over here. But there was a lot of brass that didn't know that they had radar or didn't know what radar meant, without a doubt.

JP: Okay. So now, we're a little bit after, several minutes after the fact. Some of the torpedoes had been dropped at Pearl. You're receiving direct information from somebody who's witnessing the events at Pearl Harbor.

HL: Right.

JP: Okay. What was your reaction?

HL: I just was too busy working. I had no reaction except I took a break, I recall, and I see some Japanese Zeroes now flying around, I could see the sunrise on their sides. And I don't know why, I didn't have any weapons, but some of the officers had some guns. And they were shooting at 'em with forty-fives, which is kind of silly, but they were.

JP: Okay, all right.

HL: You get mad.

JP: So there is some fire around the facility.

HL: Oh yeah. And I think these Japanese Zeroes were looking for us. Because they had some inside information as to the

facilities on the islands. And I think they were looking for us because they were zooming around and we were stationed in the cable yard and had no value otherwise other than cable, telephone cables and such as that.

JP: Okay. Well, we'll leave the speculation...

HL: Yeah.

JP: ...later. Now, later that morning, of course, the battle went on two waves, 7:55...

HL: That's right. That's right.

JP: ...8:55. You're there at the information center...

HL: That's right.

JP: ...with the Air Corps.

HL: Yes.

JP: What happened? What were you doing?

HL: We kept plotting, plotting, plotting the second wave, our B-17s, we didn't know what we had, but we had plotted 'em. Called up the Air Corps, called up the Air Force.

JP: How would you confirm that? Was there a confirmation scheme that you guys had...

HL: No, no.

JP: ...to confirm aircraft?

HL: No.

JP: Just aircraft, it could have been anything.

HL: That's right.

JP: Right?

HL: We didn't know what we had. All we knew, we had reactions on our scopes.

JP: Who could confirm that? The guys out at those eight radar facilities?

HL: No, they couldn't confirm it either. It was a hundred miles out, possibly.

JP: So you didn't know it was B-17s. They could've been enemy aircraft.

HL: That's right. All we knew, we had B-17s and the enemy was there too. So which was what, we don't know. We don't have the vaguest. That's the reason they were identified as friendly. And then they had an IFF called, identification friendly or foe, eventually, because then they sent an extra gadget up that we could see on the scope and then we recognize friendly. See, they had a method of identifying themselves, this is after, way after.

JP: Okay. Harold, I want to stop there for now, okay. And I want to pick up the story later on today. Do you have time sometime today? To talk to me?

HL: Yeah, I suppose.

JP: Another half an hour, maybe?

HL: Yeah, why not.

JP: Okay, let's stop there. Thank you for your time.

END OF INTERVIEW